

A comparison of john henry sylvesters portrait of te pehi kupe and essay

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Te Pehi Kupe's " Self Portrait."

The two portraits of Te Pehi Kupe present a sharp contrast on how different cultures view an individual. When first viewed they seem very different. However, when the aspects of context come into play the similarities are abundant. By examining each of the aspects of context one by one these similarities can be brought into sharp focus. Both portraits were completed in about the same year, at the same place and of the same subject. Both portraits may even have been created at the request of the same individual. The differences arise from how the artist portrayed the subject. The results are starkly different and arise from cultural assumptions about what defines an individual. John Henry Sylvester's color engraving is typical of other Europeans of the same era. He probably required the subject to sit for hours as the details include Te Pehi Kupe's manner of dress, hair and facial expression. It captures the facial features and the play of light and shadow on his aspect. The tattoos are just one feature among many. The self-portrait of the chieftain is a stark study in black and white of only his tattoos. He reproduced them from memory without even the use of a hand mirror. This calls the importance of studying context sharply to the forefront when we are studying art history. When we compare the contextual similarities, the differences in the resulting art artifacts are what gives insight into the artists and how their culture shaped their views of not just their subject but of their world.

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